

BALTIMORE CITY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING
URBAN DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE REVIEW PANEL
MEETING MINUTES

Date: September 11, 2014

Meeting No.: 192

Project: National Great Blacks in Wax Museum (NGBiWM)

Phase: Schematic

Location: 1601 East North Avenue

PRESENTATION:

Anthony Cataldo introduced the project team, noting that the project had previously been introduced in 2011, and the Maryland Historic Trust (MHT) had recently reviewed and accepted a modified proposal. Architect Rob Anderson, Davis Brody Bond, and landscape architect Emily Scott, PLA of Gustafson Guthrie Nichols provided an overview of proposed program and planning modifications, site context and the updated building and landscape design. Key elements include:

MHT agreements that have affected previously presented work include:

1. Reducing the number of preserved rowhouses from 5 to 2, creating a more symmetrical bookend arrangement
2. Eliminated a cantilevered new building segment in order to increase visibility to the historic firehouse hose tower from East North Avenue.

In response to UDARP comments:

1. Remove additional row homes and preserve firehouse shell, as accepted by MHT
 - a. increases street level transparency
 - b. reinforces “bookend” parti
 - c. firehouse shell is preserved in entirety
 - d. main entry appears more central
 - e. provides additional breathing space for vertical atrium that connects to the courtyard
2. Maximize green space in rear yard and provide better connectivity to East North Avenue
 - a. most parking is placed below a landscaped platform, with access from Broadway and increasing green space by approximately 50%. The garage is naturally ventilated.
 - b. A terraced bio retention area forms the eastern courtyard site boundary
 - c. surface parking is decreased to 3 handicapped spaces and 2 short term parking spaces on the east side of the site
 - d. the loading area is pulled into the building, with 2 – 3 service delivery spaces on the west side of the site

- e. there is visual porosity at the ground floor, improved sightlines to the interior courtyard, and improved pedestrian circulation throughout the site
- 3. Increase public activities along East North Avenue
 - a. reduction of preserved rowhouses adjacent to the firehouse, adjusting atrium and theater locations and introduction of a large scale graphic display wall increase visual porosity, activate program spaces and improve adjacencies, and improve visual connection to the interior courtyard through the atrium connection.
 - b. verticality is enhanced through use of the channel glass system, and curtainwall and expressed interior cores visible the more transparent base and curtainwall
 - c. single-faced channel glass system creates a shadowbox, which will be internally illuminated at night.
- 4. Improve integration of firehouse overlap
 - a. the Genealogy Overlook is pulled back from the west façade of the firehouse on North Bond Street
 - b. the contemporary fourth floor Genealogy Overlook is angled away from the northwest corner to create a sightline to the full historic hose tower from the northeast corner of North Bond and East North Avenue
 - c. Genealogy Overlook massing is elevated above the firehouse
 - d. a full second floor is added to the hyphen addition between the tower and the original firehouse
- 5. Provide a landscaping plan
 - a. Landscape design values
 - i. reclaim, infill, stabilize, revitalize
 - ii. destination with a sense of place
 - iii. create a cultural heart, and nurture relationship to the community
 - iv. create a symbolic narrative of journey and discovery
 - v. add color and vibrancy to a bleak urban area
 - vi. encourage immersion into the landscape
 - vii. spaces create solidarity, cohesion and unity
 - b. Forestry
 - i. Maryland's history of innovative forestry methods, conservation, investment and sustainability, both in practice and in law
 - ii. life-cycle of cities – land claimed for urban development is partially returned to greenspace
 - iii. implied forest edge frame special space
 - iv. large trees are luxurious yet egalitarian, and benefit everyone
 - c. Organization
 - i. a natural field of alternating wooded and meadow bands work in conjunction with the organizational grid of the architecture
 - ii. lawn and terrace mirror the museum volume
 - d. Museum entry
 - i. continuity at the street edge
 - ii. threshold of paving and planting implying street wall and relating to the interior ground of the museum
 - e. East North Avenue Streetscape

- i. existing streetscape is block to block inconsistent – trees and curb alignment
 - ii. London Plane tree for street trees – appropriate scale and form for civic building
 - iii. create a consistent “lay by” for anticipated visitor volume of buses
- f. Project perimeter
 - i. planting and terraces mark edge and entrances
 - ii. provide friendly, soft edge to neighborhood
- g. Courtyard
 - i. banded and edged
 - ii. meandering path
 - iii. pasture overlook

PANEL COMMENTS:

The panel provided the following comments:

The panel applauded MHT agreements and their overall impact on the project design.

In response to UDARP comments:

1. *Remove additional row homes and preserve firehouse shell, as accepted by MHT*
 - a. generally improved pending further refinement of the ground floor façade
 - b. main entry is, in fact, biased toward the firehouse. This poses no major issue.
 - c. the additional space for the atrium is an improvement
2. *Maximize green space in rear yard and provide better connectivity to East North Avenue*
 - a. placing parking and services below a landscaped platform is a major improvement
 - b. access from Broadway pushed south into the neighborhood should be reconsidered. Consider moving the parking entry to the north closer to the body of the museum, in the area currently proposed for ADA + visitor parking
 - c. increasing green space is a major improvement
 - d. provide a rendering that shows connection from North Avenue to the rear terrace
 - e. access from the atrium to the rear courtyard past the loading area requires further refinement
3. *Increase public activities along East North Avenue*
 - a. placement of active uses along the street façade is a significant improvement
 - b. the visual and physical connection to the interior courtyard through the atrium connection is still suspect and needs to be either proven or improved. The atrium seems to be the single greatest opportunity to make a strong connection from North Avenue to the courtyard, and it is diminutive
 - c. the massing expression is very horizontal; the verticality through use of the channel glass system is effective – IF the project budget will support it
 - d. the panel expressed concern that internal illumination will be subject to operating budget constraints with limited hours of use, thereby limiting its effectiveness

4. *Improve integration of firehouse overlap*
 - a. the Genealogy Overlook is still too pronounced, and weighs too heavily on the firehouse (in contrast to the relationship of the to-be restored mansion house and the new building)
 - b. consider further reduction, and opening views to the house tower from the east as well as west. provide additional rendering showing the Genealogy Overlook and hose tower from the east view
5. *Provide a landscaping plan*
 - a. the landscape design is well articulated and thoughtful
 - b. consider perimeter fencing, landscaping, and width of alleys – could the alley be improved to a 15’ width to the benefit of both the museum and the neighborhood
6. *General*
 - a. this is a very large and ambitious project for the neighborhood. There were questions raised regarding the significant funding needed to execute this design. The material choice and the need for it to be lit in order to convey the strong message so integral to the design forced the question of if the budget is not there to support this idea, should an alternate material choice be investigated now.
 - b. the panel generally likes the design direction of the project, and looks forward to refinement and development
 - c. the panel questioned the metaphorical narrative between the design of the exterior and the use: is this just a good contemporary building, or is there a strong connection to the program?

PANEL ACTION:

The Panel recommends approval with the above comments.

Attending:

Cody McNeal, Ryan Moyer, Rob Anderson – Davis Brody Bond

Emily Scott – GGN

Addison Palmer – STV

Marie J. Washington, Jackie Washington – EBEI

Joanne M. Martin – Great Blacks in Wax Museum

Kevin Litten – BBJ

Liam Davis – Council President’s Office

Mica Fetz - BDC

UDARP Panel Members – Dr. Judith Meany, Messrs. Gary Bowden, Rich Burns and David Haresign*

Planning Department- Director Tom Stosur, Anthony Cataldo, Christina Gaymon, Wolde Ararsa